

BELMONT WARRANT COMMITTEE FY08 MEETING MINUTES  
FINAL  
SEPTEMBER 24, 2008, 7:30 P.M.  
CHENERY MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY ROOM

Present: Chair Curtis; Members Brusch, Epstein, Heigham, Hofmann, Jones, Libenson, Lynch, McLaughlin, Paolillo, Smith, Widmer; BOS Chair Firenze, School Committee Chair Bowe

Town Accountant Hagg, Town Treasurer Carman, Assistant Town Administrator Conti

Absent: Members Allison and Callanan

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 pm by Chair Curtis.

Chair Curtis began the meeting by turning to the approval of minutes.

Minutes of September 17, 2008

The minutes of 9/17/08 were approved with corrections. Two members abstained.

#### Discussion of Summer Projects

Chair Curtis stated that he was curious as to where the Warrant Committee is with regard to its "Summer Projects."

1.) Social Contract with the Belmont Voter. This, Curtis said, is an ongoing project. The Social Contract will be revisited regularly throughout the fall. Those working on the Social Contract hope to present a document by the end of the year explaining what they have done, are doing, and hope to do.

2.) Improving the Budget Process. Member Brusch: An initial piece of this concerned the budget calendar, which is already done. Regarding budget comparisons, we are looking at other budgets and have gotten a lot of ideas from those budgets. BOS Chair Firenze raised the issue of "zero based budgeting" and its impact on preparing a budget. He asked: Does the WC intend to proceed using this budgeting method?

Member Paolillo: It would be effective for the three main committees (BOS, WC, SC) to sit down together to discuss budget priorities with the \$4M budget gap in mind to decide: What do we want to focus on as a community? The "core services" discussion is difficult, as something is always core to some group in town. Chair Curtis: Core services are related to budget priorities. This will be an important conversation in a year of insufficient resources. We will be forced to look at what we want to do. Member Brusch added that the override discussion (including the amount) will be ongoing for this year. Detailed information will need to be provided so that people will know exactly what will happen if an override fails.

3.) Unfinished Business for Blueprint Group. Regarding consolidation, Chair Curtis said we will need to have an answer for voters as to what is or is not happening, and why.

4.) Town Budget Comparisons. Member Brusch: We are interviewing Town Managers in all 4 towns and will have a report ready for November.

5.) Core Services. Member Heigham: Less is required by state statute than previously thought. There are no state requirements for a senior center, or for a recreation department. Communities

must have both fire and police departments, but the scope of the departments can be cut down. Schools must be maintained and certain courses must be taught, but we are not required to offer athletics, some courses are optional, and there are no limits on class sizes. Member Jones offered that this is an appropriate place to look at the budget process via zero based budgeting. We can start with what is required, and build the budget up from there. A way to prioritize budget items, Jones said, is to start with what we must keep.

Member Widmer: We can't reduce the \$4M gap without laying people off. We must discuss the specifics: how many cut from the police, fire, and highway departments? how many teachers cut? Member McLaughlin: The WC's job is to provide an override and a non-override budget. From there, the voters will decide. We must make it clear what will be lost if they vote down the override. BOS Chair Firenze: There is a perception among voters that Belmont's pay scales and retirement plans are too generous. Is it possible to negotiate different pension/benefit packages for newly hired employees? Firenze asked wondered how many employees receive benefits but work part-time hours (20-25 hours per week).

6.) Time of Day Pricing for Electricity. Member McLaughlin noted that he met with the Light Department, and they seem to have gotten the message that time-of-day pricing was a good idea. He said it will prove to be an especially good idea when electric cars are used (in a few years) and need to be charged (plugged in) at night.

#### Subcommittee Assignments

Chair Curtis passed out the 2008-2009 list of subcommittee assignments. The main change, he said, was that the Education subcommittee was increased from 5 to 6 members this year. Each subcommittee can make substantial contributions, he continued, and he encouraged committees to meet early, to meet often, and to choose a chair.

BOS Chair Firenze noted that the system is two-pronged: Town Administrator Younger meets with department heads and then the WC subcommittee meets with department heads. Some department heads feel that the WC is checking up on the way the department is managed. Assistant Town Administrator Conti added that department heads find themselves answering the same questions every year to slightly different people. Member McLaughlin suggested then that Mr. Younger meet with the departments at the same time the WC meets with them. Member Hofmann added that the WC does not have an agenda, but rather forces a fresh look and can do so without "the manager" looking over their shoulders.

#### Agenda for 10/1 Joint Meeting with BOS and SC

Chair Curtis: Next week's WC meeting will be a joint meeting with the BOS and the SC. The WC will form the agenda, and the meeting will be run by the WC Chair. Curtis stated that he would like to solicit ideas for the agenda. The following is a compilation of the agenda item ideas generated by various WC members:

- " the \$4M budget deficit
- " addressing budget priorities going forward
- " assessing the budget process with a review of important dates
- " how to educate voters that these bodies (BOS/SC/WC) have done a good job and still will need to request more money from them (override)
- " how to present a unified front to voters (among the BOS/SC/WC)
- " a joint statement from the 3 bodies (BOS/SC/WC) that without an override, layoffs will result
- " the town/school money split
- " school/town outsourcing

- " the report summarizing the residents' comments during the post-override meeting
- " a short update on the Senior Center project
- " a schedule of upcoming WC meetings

Other

Chair Curtis announced that there will be a meeting for new WC members to be held on Wednesday, October 22. All WC members are welcome to attend the training.

Town Accountant Hagg and Member Bruschi announced that on Saturday, November 1, from 9:00am - 3:00pm the Town Committee Association is holding its training session. Please contact Ms. Hagg if you would like to attend the meeting. Registration fees will be covered.

Member Heigham moved that the WC adjourn at 9:03 pm.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio  
WC Recording Secretary